Offa's Dyke
Journal

Volume 3

Edited by Howard Williams and Liam Delaney

Aims and Scope

Offa's Dyke Journal is a peer-reviewed venue for the publication of high-quality research on the archaeology, history and heritage of frontiers and borderlands focusing on the Anglo-Welsh border. The editors invite submissions that explore dimensions of Offa's Dyke, Wat's Dyke and the 'short dykes' of western Britain, including their life-histories and landscape contexts. *ODJ* will also consider comparative studies on the material culture and monumentality of frontiers and borderlands from elsewhere in Britain, Europe and beyond. We accept:

1. Notes and Reviews of up to 3,000 words
2. Interim reports on fieldwork of up to 5,000 words
3. Original discussions, syntheses and analyses of up to 10,000 words

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Offa's Dyke Journal

Volume 3 for 2021

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Drawing the Line:
What's Wat's Dyke? Practice and Process

John G. Swogger and Howard Williams

Often neglected and misunderstood, there are considerable challenges to digital and real-world public engagement with Britain's third-longest linear monument, Wat's Dyke (Williams 2020a). To foster public education and understanding regarding of Wat's Dyke's relationship to the broader story of Anglo-Welsh borderlands, but also to encourage the monument's management and conservation, we proposed the creation of a comic heritage trail (Swogger and Williams 2020). Funded by the University of Chester and the Offa's Dyke Association, we selected one prominent stretch where Wat's Dyke is mainly damaged and fragmentary and yet also there remain well-preserved and monumental sections. Around Wrexham, Wat's Dyke navigates varied topographies including following and crossing river valleys, and it is accessible to the public in the vicinity of North Wales's largest town. In this article we outline the dialogue and decision-making process behind the map and 10-panel comic: What's Wat's Dyke? Wrexham Comic Heritage Trail (Swogger and Williams 2021; Williams and Swogger 2021a–b). In particular, we consider the stages taken to adapt from the initial plan of producing a bilingual map guide in response to the circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. This digital resource, published online in Welsh and English, guides visitors and locals alike along a central stretch of Wat's Dyke around Wrexham town from Bryn Alyn hillfort to the north to Middle Sontley to the south. The comic heritage trail thus responds to the highly fragmented nature of the monument and utilises the linearity of Wat's Dyke as a gateway to explore the complex Anglo-Welsh borderlands from prehistory to the present day. Building on earlier discussions (Swogger 2019), What's Wat's Dyke? illustrates the potential of future projects which use comics to explore linear monuments and linear heritage features (from ancient trackways and roads to railways and canals) constructed across the world from prehistory to recent times.

Keywords: comics, heritage, public archaeology, Wat's Dyke

Introduction

Williams (2020a) reviewed the public archaeology and heritage of Wat's Dyke and introduced the challenge of developing new initiatives for engaging contemporary communities and visitors with the 'monumental intangibility' of the monument. This c. 62–64km-long bank and ditch was built near-continuously along the edge of the Welsh uplands from the Dee estuary at Basingwerk (Flintshire) to the Morda Brook south of Maesbury (Shropshire) (Fox 1955; Malim and Hayes 2008; Belford 2019; Worthington Hill 2019; Malim 2020). Traditionally regarded as a construction of the Mercian kingdom in the late seventh, eighth or early ninth centuries AD, it can be considered a 'frontier work' created to control and curtail movement through the landscape in times of peace and conflict. Debates and uncertainty persist regarding its precise date and purpose, notably whether Wat's Dyke was a predecessor, successor, or supplement to Offa's Dyke (e.g. Fitzpatrick-Matthews 2020; Ray 2020).

Williams (2020a) makes clear that Wat's Dyke is underappreciated and misunderstood by the public and experts alike. Indeed, it is under-represented in print and online maps, guides and other repositories and resources with few exceptions (see Burnham 1995; Lewis 2008). Counterintuitively, it is more readily apprehended by visitors and locals via naming practices of houses and streets, as well as schools, parks and a long-distance walking trail (Wat's Dyke Way) than as a monument in itself (see also Williams 2020b). Meanwhile, even when interacting with popular publicly accessible heritage sites, including the later prehistoric Old Oswestry Hillfort, the National Trust property of Erddig Hall and Gardens, and the industrial heritage landscape of Greenfield Valley, Wat's Dyke receives sparse, limited, vague and often inaccurate attention. Moreover, its associated walking trail and public profile are neither as prominent as its longer and better-known borderlands companion-monument: Offa's Dyke.

This situation should be a call to urgent action because, neglected in physical and conceptual terms, Wat's Dyke is prone to physical damage and neglect but also susceptible to appropriation by fringe narratives and political extremist appropriations. Indeed, only recently have the Offa's Dyke Association incorporated Wat's Dyke within their responsibility and charitable aims. This is especially problematic relating to contemporary discourses on Englishness and Welshness in this borderland region which have been amplified because of Brexit and the pandemic lockdowns. Despite north-east Wales being home to complex communities of recent immigrants and a long-term synergy between Welsh and English-speaking communities, divisive nationalist discourses are continuing to attach themselves to Offa's Dyke and thus Wat's Dyke by association, in framing and opposing English and Welsh identities and politics (see also Fitzpatrick-Matthews 2020; Ray 2020; Williams 2020c; see also Williams 2016, 2019a; Maldonado 2019).

This article reviews our journey from identified rationale to publication of the *What's Wat's Dyke? Wrexham Comic Heritage Trail*. Our aim with this article is to provide not only a record of our process, dialogue and decision-making of benefit for other practitioners and users of the comic, but also to provide a firm foundation upon which subsequent evaluations of its success can be built. However, at time of writing, we are not in a position to fully consider the impact of the comic among visitors and local communities, given the ongoing impact and legacy of the COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions.

A heritage comic for Wrexham: from rationale to process

To address this specific set of socio-political circumstances, and building on the Offa's Dyke Association's enhanced charitable aims to support public engagement and appreciation of Wat's Dyke, Williams (2020a) proposed the development of:

1. A research, conservation and management strategy for Wat's Dyke and its multi-period landscape setting;

2. The production of an up-to-date map and guide book for visitors, available in print and digitally;

3. Fostering and supporting community archaeology projects to research and sustain interest in the monument.

In an earlier publication, we set out the rationale for a heritage comic as a means of promoting each of these discrete endeavours, both to explore Wat's Dyke in itself but also to use the monument as an anchor to convey aspects of the complex evolution of the Anglo-Welsh borderlands and its communities (Swogger and Williams 2020; see also Swogger 2019a–c, 2020). Having previously contextualised our approach in relation to other heritage comics, we now present the decision-making process of dialogue between an archaeologist and an archaeological illustrator to envision Wat's Dyke and its landscape biography in the environs of Wrexham. *What's Wat's Dyke? Wrexham Comic Heritage Trail* was conceived as an ideal test-case since it allows the exploration of a stretch of Wat's Dyke which incorporates sections both destroyed and denuded, along with as well as well-preserved sections, all within or in the vicinity of a large conurbation.

Fifteen potential readily accessible stretches were identified where locals and others can visit the monument and/or its former course (Table 1; Figure 1). Using a selection of these places, our aims are to:

1. foster local people's and tourists' ability to engage with the monument as it is, and imagine how it was;

2. craft a story to include landscape and biography and engagement with the different materials and components of the linear monument;

3. encourage recognition of the wider significance in early medieval linear earthworks in comparative terms – part of local borderland stories, as well as both 'English' and 'Welsh' national stories, and wider comparative international stories of conflict, territoriality, ideology and identity in frontier zones past and present.

The nature of Wat's Dyke around Wrexham presents a series of particular challenges to interpreting the monument in a way that explains its history and construction, its original context and meaning, and what has happened to the monument in the centuries up to the present day. Because of the broken and interrupted nature of the monument and its varied accessibilities and scales of survival, any explanation has to account not just for the monument itself where it can be seen, but also for the spaces between where it survives: its absence as well as its presence within the heritage landscape of Wrexham. But despite the fact that the surviving fragments of the Dyke can be difficult to see, challenges both to access and interpretation, an engaging story about the monument, its likely (but not proven) seventh to ninth-century functions and meanings, and its later history, can be told to those who visit it.

Table 1: Key locations of Wat's Dyke in Wrexham identified Howard Williams's blog-post 'Where can you visit Wat's Dyke in Wrexham' augmented by others and subject to discussion in this chapter as foci for the development of the What's Wat's Dyke comic (after Swogger and Williams 2020).

| Map Number	Location Name	Features	Access
1	Alyn Waters Country Park	No surviving traces of the monument on the scarp above the valley, but the likely line of the Dyke frames the top of the valley slope overlooking the country park	Access on foot or bicycle. If arriving by car, park in one of the designated car parks for Alyn Waters Country Park and walk or cycle from there
2	Llay New Road	No clear traces of the dyke surviving, but the top of scarp overlooking the Alyn is where the Dyke likely ran	Access on foot on the Wat's Dyke Way, or park and walk from Alyn Waters Country Park
3	Bryn Alyn Hillfort	The possible line of the Dyke descending into the valley from the site of the Iron Age hillfort	The hillfort itself is on private land, but the footpath beside the river allows views
4	Bluebell Lane, Pandy	Multiple surviving sections of Wat's Dyke surviving as field boundaries	Park on Bluebell Lane, Pandy and on public footpath across the fields following the Wat's Dyke Way
5	Ty Gwyn Lane, Garden Village	A section of Wat's Dyke preserved as a property boundary facing over a public park between housing developments leading uphill to Wat's Dyke Primary School	Park on Wat's Dyke Way or Tegwen Lane and accessible on foot or bicycle
6	Wat's Dyke Primary School	The monument survives in a 'green lung' stretching south of Wat's Dyke Primary School west of Buckingham Road	Park by Wat's Dyke Primary School or on Buckingham Road and access on foot or by bicycle
7	Crispin Lane, Wrexham	Wat's Dyke survives on line-side land east of Crispin Lane	Park on Crispin Lane or walk from Wrexham General railway station.
8	Premier Inn, Wrexham General Railway Station	A reconstructed segment of Wat's Dyke sits adjacent to the Premier Inn parallel to the railway line	Opposite Wrexham General railway station
9	Coleg Cambria, Wrexham	South of the Ruthin Road, Wat's Dyke survives beside allotments and an alleyway	Walk from Morrisons supermarket, Bellevue Park
10	Wrexham Cemetery	Wat's Dyke runs through the older graves on the west side of the municipal cemetery	Park at Wrexham Cemetery or in layby on the Ruabon Road
11	Court Wood	A well-preserved pair of sections of Wat's Dyke used as a modern property marker	Accessible on foot from any of the National Trust car park situated on the Erddig estate, on Wat's Dyke Way
12	Erddig Castle	The Anglo-Norman castle of Erddig reused a location deployed in the line of Wat's Dyke	Accessible on foot from any of the National Trust car park situated on the Erddig estate
13	Big Wood, Erddig	Well-preserved segments of the monument in woodland between the castle and Erddig Hall	Accessible on foot from any of the National Trust car park situated on the Erddig estate
14	The Rookery, Erddig Park	A well-preserved section of Wat's Dyke overlooking the Black Brook	Accessible on foot from any of the National Trust car park situated on the Erddig estate, on Wat's Dyke Way
15	South of Bryn Goleu to Middle Sontley	A well-preserved section of Wat's Dyke	Accessible on foot from any of the National Trust car park situated on the Erddig estate, on Wat's Dyke Way
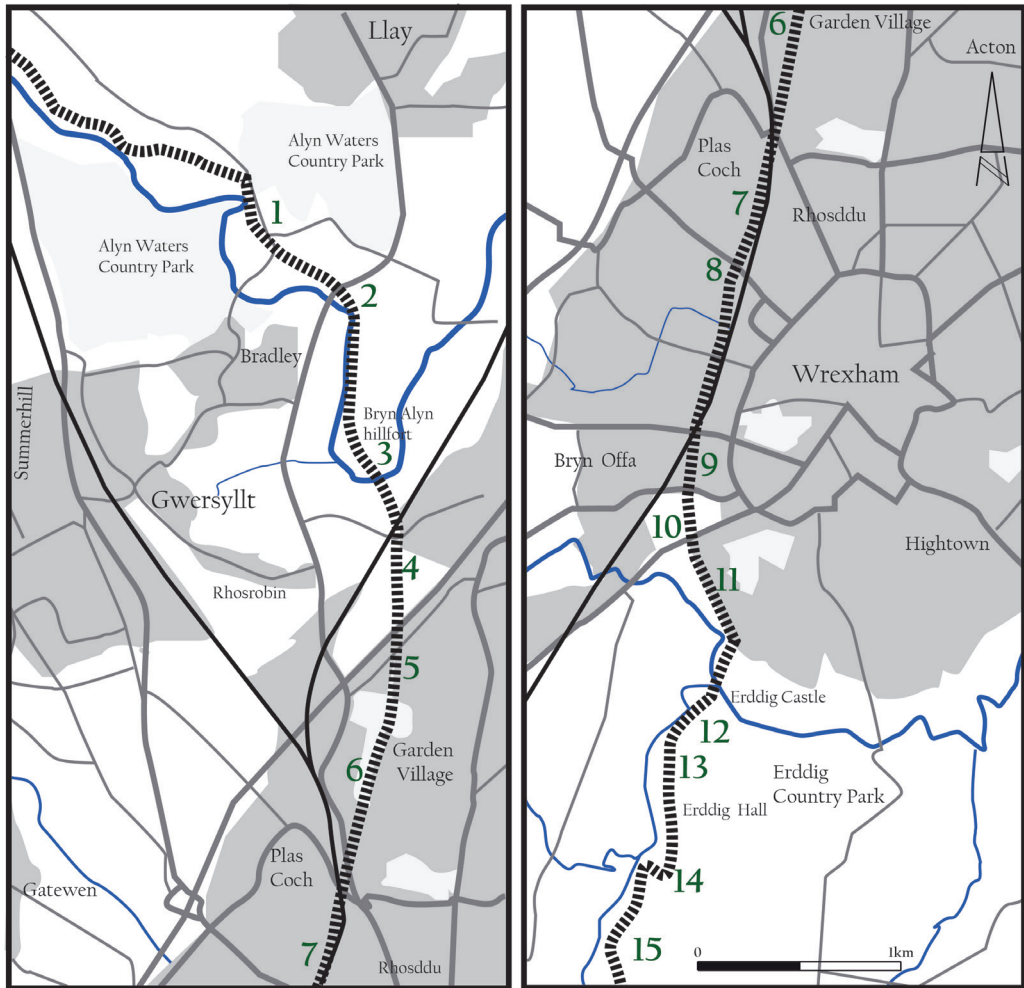
Figure 1: Map of the key locations of Wat's Dyke in Wrexham identified for HW's blog-post 'Where can you visit Wat's Dyke in Wrexham?' augmented by others and subject to discussion in this paper as foci for the development of the What's Wat's Dyke comic (Map by Howard Williams, 2020, after Swogger and Williams 2020)

As Swogger (2019a–c) surveys, comics have become a critical media utilised to explore many themes and debates in public archaeology and heritage (Swogger 2019c), but they have a particular power to tell the stories of heritage in borderland contexts (Swogger 2019a). Yet, the potential for the comic medium for specifically telling this linear earthwork's story around Wrexham was discovered when the authors during field visits, touring the dyke in autumn 2019 (see also Williams 2019b). It became clear that the key to understanding the monument lay in being able to (1) spot what was hidden, (2) reconstruct what had vanished, and (3) provide context for what was isolated or disjointed. This applies to rural, suburban and urban areas as well as the cemetery and parkland where it is at least partially marked. To be explicit: no previous attempts to recognise and interpret Wat's Dyke are consistent, clear and satisfactory (Williams 2020a; Swogger and Williams 2020).

We began to design a guide locals and visitors to Wat's Dyke across Wrexham by car, bike, on foot or via mobility scooter. The choice of points on this map, and the design of the visualisations, will in turn help tell the larger story of the reasons for the dyke being sited where it was, the different ways in which it was constructed, and the reasons why it no longer survives as a contiguous whole. Almost incidentally, such an explanation will also serve to introduce audiences to the rest of the history of Wrexham: Wat's Dyke providing a literal and metaphorical thread to follow through the town's story. If the eventual aim of better presenting Wat's Dyke is to better engage both local as well as visiting audiences with the monument, then it may be that interpretations of the dyke will need to move away from 'specialist', site-based presentations. Exploring how local communities already engage with Wat's Dyke – even just as a street name – may provide a useful starting point for alternative mechanisms for engagement.

Our map and comic panels hence aimed, for the first time, to help those touring the monument to spot it in various contexts and states of preservation. Let us now review the results and our strategies and choices with each image.[1]

The map

Our original plan had been to produce a printed map. However, restrictions imposed from the COVID-19 pandemic made a digital comic much more logical and viable, taking full advantage of digital media. The map was intended to function as an informational 'hub' for the tour. Each location on the map was embedded with hyperlinks so that the explanatory panels could be accessed directly. The advantages here were that readers were not necessarily bound by any linear format or predetermined reading order, nor even by the geographical realities of the locations themselves.[2] This non-linearity has therefore both spatial and chronological dimensions: allowing readers to explore a linear monument through time and space at their own choosing without a fixed singular narrative.

Since the objective of the comic was to facilitate visits to the monument, the map contained information which might help readers select locations according to 'visitor-based' priorities and criteria: road routes, parking, public transport connections and disabled access. As not every location is equally accessible for all types of visitors, the importance of noting such information was highlighted by preview audiences on social media. Accessibility was also indicated visually in some of the panels (comic panel 3, location 6, is the best example), adding further detail to the information on the map. The

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[1] The comic was launched to coincide with the Council for British Archaeology's Festival of Archaeology on 19 July 2021: (Swogger and Williams 2021a) and published on the website of the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory (Williams and Swogger 2021a). The entire comic is published in this volume (Williams and Swogger 2021b).

[2] However, this approach does mean that every panel in the series must be able to function as the *first* panel in the series, meaning that every image and text must be written without assuming prior knowledge in the reader of any other panel or piece of text in the series. This requires careful mapping of, in particular, definitions of terminology and core concepts.

map deliberately echoed the comics panels in both style, lettering and colour palette, so that the map would feel like 'part of' the panels: the line of the dyke and the labels for each location on the map, for example, used the same colour yellow as the labels and dashed lines in the comics panels which indicated the location of the dyke.

Locations and panels

Location 1 – Alyn Waters Country Park – SJ 362 545

We had originally considered a location at Alyn Waters Country Park given it is a popular leisure destination and on the line of the Wat's Dyke Way long-distance walking trail. However, Wat's Dyke does not survive as a discernible earthwork here and its former location is inaccessible within field boundaries without public access. Hence, we decided to reference how Wat's Dyke heads north following the top of the eastern scarp overlooking the River Alyn at location 3 rather than feature this location in the heritage trail itself. There is potential to include this location if the heritage trail is expanded.

Location 2 – Llay New Road – SJ 330 543

From the modern Bradley–Llay Road (Llay New Road) one can access the top of the scarp above the River Alyn in two directions (north-west and south-east). It is surmised that Wat's Dyke once ran along here overlooking the Alyn valley. Today it is accessible via footpaths which are part of the Wat's Dyke Way. However, there are no definitive traces of the monument to either side of the road and so we decided to reference the route at this location in the comic panel for location 3. Again, there is potential to include this location if the heritage trail is expanded.

Comic panel 1, location 3 – Wat's Dyke at the River Alyn – SJ 332 531

For our first panel location we selected the junction of Plas Acton Road and Blue Bell Lane where Wat's Dyke is destroyed and lost. Still, this location allowed discussion of the monument's likely behaviour in relation to the River Alyn, incorporating Bryn Alyn Iron Age hillfort (which is on private land and thus omitted form the Wat's Dyke Way footpath). While the walk down to the Alyn through Wilderness Wood is steep and there are no traces of the monument to be seen, it makes sense to start with stretches where the monument is absent in today's landscape and envision how it might have once appeared. So, we began by showing a long-distance vista north from this vicinity, all of which one cannot see today. We show how Wat's Dyke follows the top of the eastern scarp of the Alyn valley to the north, but as it approaches the Alyn it drops down the river cliff, traverses the river before rising up south towards the higher ground upon which the viewer stands. This allowed us to discuss how the monument operates in relation to river valleys in two contrasting fashions – following and blocking – and thus responding to the topography.

This panel therefore introduces the longer-distance route and strategic placement of the monument. We also made guesses about the relationships with trackways, watch towers, beacons and the structure of the monument itself. We decided to show Wat's Dyke palisaded with watch towers *behind* rather than included in its line, not because of any specific precedent.[3] We left the possibility of gateways' presence, form and character to the imagination, but implied by a Mercian warrior gesturing to a Welsh farmer with his cow as to where he might go to pass through the monument. In this way we depict Wat's Dyke as a formidable and military barrier, but one lightly and intermittently guarded, deployed to control movement in peacetime as well as in times of conflict. This is in stark contrast to former representations which emphasise its role in conflict almost exclusively (Williams 2020a: 174, 182). In the text, we conjure a sense of what the monument might have looked at, but we also posed questions regarding the duration and character of its active use and the nature of its relationship with water courses and the reuse of the Iron Age ramparts (see also Williams 2021).

Comic panel 2, location 4 – Wat's Dyke at Pandy – SJ 333 527

While panel 1 depicted the Early Middle Ages, panel 2 envisions the monument in today's landscape. For this second panel we selected the line of the Wat's Dyke Way along footpaths in the fields south of Pandy to where Wat's Dyke is bisected and broken by the line of the A483. Here, we depicted an aerial perspective showing the intermittent and varied survival of the monument's bank and ditch, as well as the relationship of the earthwork to fields in which animals graze and local dogwalkers and others take their exercise. This angle also encourages visitors to appreciate Wat's Dyke's relationship with sections of the monuments further north in the Alyn Valley and south towards Wrexham town centre but poses the question: do local folks realise they are walking along Wat's Dyke at all (there are no heritage interpretation panels)?

Location 5 – Ty Gwyn Lane – SJ 333 525

Wat's Dyke is preserved in the rear property line of back gardens along Wats Dyke Way. While there is potential to include this location if the heritage trail is expanded, this section is effectively subsumed into the discussion of panel 3, location 6.

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[3]   There have been no attempts to represent the infrastructure of Wat's Dyke, with many presuming there were none as default. Certainly, there is no direct material evidence for any towers, gates or other features. However, we were keen to raise the possibility that (a) the linear earthwork did not exist in isolation but as part of a wider network of installations and features (inspired by Ray and Bapty 2016: 229–251) and (b) that watch towers and fortlets might have been situated to maximise visual communications along the monument's line and both forward and back over longer distances (see Murrieta-Flores and Williams 2017), not built on the bank itself to observe the immediate foreground. For this reconstruction, we created the simplest possible structure, without even a roof, but other scenarios are of course possible. In doing so, we prompt conversations about possible alternative reconstructions of the monument, rather than attempting to impose a singular vision.

Comic panel 3, location 6 – Wat's Dyke at the School – SJ 331 518

Having represented how Wat's Dyke may have appeared when newly constructed and how it endures in fragments in a semi-rural environment, bisected by modern roads and disrupted by field boundaries and field gates, we move into Wrexham's suburbs. Panel 3 shows how Wat's Dyke has been incorporated into modern property boundaries in Garden Village. Whilst 'consumed' by development, Wat's Dyke remains a prominent feature traversed by footpaths, running past and giving its name to Wat's Dyke Primary School.

We chose to represent a section of the monument 350m south of Wat's Dyke Primary School where the tarmac alley from Buckingham Road traverses the surviving bank. Because the tarmac means the rampart is free of vegetation, it serves to preserve its profile. This location thus reveals the scale of the monument despite damage and interruptions to its original continuous form. Meanwhile, it shows how the monument, even where near-invisible to non-specialist, still interacts with people's daily lives as they ascend or descend the surviving bank under tarmac. It also meant we were selecting a location where the Dyke was readily accessible to those with mobility challenges and for whom other sections of the monument might not be so easily accessible.

Comic panel 4, location 7 – Wat's Dyke at the Football Ground – SJ 331 518

Complementing the rural, semi-rural and suburban representations of Wat's Dyke, we next explored how Wat's Dyke is subsumed within the western edges of Wrexham town centre. Here, the monument survives in badly damaged sections between the railway line and Crispin Lane as it approaches Wrexham General railway station and close to other well-known Wrexham landmarks, including Wrexham AFC's home ground. The pre-eminent locator of the football ground was chosen less because of immediate proximity as because it situates the Dyke in terms of modern routes but also modern preoccupations, sports and leisure. Here, we adopted what was closest to a map view; a high aerial perspective in order to illustrate multiple locations on either side of the Mold Road and Wrexham General (in other words locations not visible from each other on the ground) in one image.

Location 8 – SJ 329 507

The reconstructed Wat's Dyke next to the Premier Inn could be the focus of a future expansion of the heritage trail. In that circumstance, it would be a valuable place to discuss the value and challenge of reconstructing ancient monuments. However, the idea to represent the reconstructed section of Wat's Dyke between the Premier Inn and the railway lines separately was abandoned since it became readily feasible to incorporate this location into the overall representation of comic panel 4, location 7.

Location 9 – SJ 327 498

A future expansion of the heritage trail could readily show Wat's Dyke running close to the Morrisons supermarket and along property boundaries close to Coleg Cambria beside

allotments. However, we decided to incorporate reference to these relationships in the text accompanying comic panel 5, location 10, rather than creating a separate panel for this stretch.

Comic panel 5, location 10 – Wat's Dyke at the Cemetery – SJ 326 495

The only place where Wat's Dyke has been inscribed in today's landscape is within Wrexham Cemetery. Here, the monument appears on the cemetery sign and where the cemetery paths cross the line of the monument in Wrexham Cemetery (Williams 2020a: 178–179). Covered in graves, we decided to show the late Victorian cemetery in use, with a funeral taking place and a new coffin being interred into the bank of Wat's Dyke. This allowed us to discuss the interplay between early medieval past and Victorian necrogeography through the choice to reutilise the bank into the landscape design. Furthermore, it specifically allowed us to show the cumulative interplay between Victorian funerary monuments of different scales and subjects, including one inspired by early medieval carved stone monuments, associated with Wat's Dyke (in other words, the landscape involves multiple funerary medievalisms including both reuse and replication).

Comic panel 6, location 11 – Wat's Dyke at Court Wood – SJ 326 493

For a second panel, we envision the Early Middle Ages and imagine Mercian warriors and a thegn intercepting Welsh herders and their livestock beside the Afon Clywedog with Wat's Dyke looming above. We aimed this to contrast with comic panel 1 in showing how Wat's Dyke was more than a borderline to defend, but the spine of a complex frontier infrastructure controlling traffic along key valleys (see also Ray and Bapty 2016 for Offa's Dyke). Meanwhile, while Comic Panel 1 showed warriors behind Wat's Dyke, we here articulate that Mercian control extended to the broader landscape westwards and how horse riders would sustain communication and organisation in this landscape of control. The impressive and intimidating nature of the Dyke and its careful use of the natural topography is also captured in autumn.

Comic panel 7, location 12 – Wat's Dyke at Erddig Castle – SJ 326 487

We jump forward to the late eleventh or early twelfth century in our choice to represent Wat's Dyke as an already ancient monument incorporated into the ramparts of an Anglo-Norman motte-and-bailey castle on a prominent spur (see also Swallow 2016). We consulted widely on the appearance of the motte-and-bailey castle but the aim was to show not just the castle, but the strategic associations of both Wat's Dyke and the later castle with the confluence of the Black Brook and the Afon Clywedog. Incidentally, we also think it near-unique to portray an Anglo-Norman castle in wintertime, thus also allowing the landscape to be shown through multiple seasons across each panel.

Comic panel 8, location 13 – Wat's Dyke at Big Wood – SJ 325 483

To our knowledge, this was the first time an archaeological illustration has focused on the removal of an ancient monument in the post-medieval period because archaeological illustration

since maps and images of designed landscapes tend to show idealised representations of use, not the landscaping in process. We used this scene to explain Wat's Dyke's intermittent deliberate obliteration through sections of the Erddig estate, especially in front of the house. Meanwhile, the image serves to foreground the absence of heritage interpretation for the monument by the National Trust; this is a distinctive opportunity to envision the monument for large numbers of contemporary visitors (Williams 2020a: 177, 180).

Comic panel 9, location 14 – Wat's Dyke at Erddig Park – SJ 325 480 and SJ 324 478

The contrasting preservation of Wat's Dyke along the top of the escarpment down to the Black Brook provided an opportunity to show the history of archaeological investigation, juxtaposing Sir Cyril Fox surveying the monument in this location in 1932 with an image of Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust's recent excavations close by (Belford 2019). Again, to our knowledge this is a first attempt to use comics to show archaeological investigations into linear earthworks as opposed to simply their past and present-day appearances (see Swogger 2020).

Comic panel 10, location 15 – Wat's Dyke towards Middle Sontley – SJ 323 475

We wanted to include a fully rural setting for Wat's Dyke in one panel and selected a location where the monument is followed by the Wat's Dyke Way, running south from Erddig Park. Here, we remind readers that the monument expands far beyond the confines of the section around Wrexham. Walkers can explore it for shorter distances or longer treks. Furthermore, we wanted to capture how the monument navigates different landscapes and is part of a broader landscape with wildlife and views. In short, this image seeks to explain that you can use traditional maps and digital resources, taking short outings or longer expeditions, and still encounter Wat' Dyke, showing individuals of different ages and genders and using different devices (mobile phone and map).

Having reviewed the final product, let us delve into the process of dialogue involved in its creation. This not only explains the choices adopted for our comic, but reveals the creative dialogue which might inform those wishing to work on comics themselves.

Practice and process

Published online as a series of non-linear hyperlinked web pages, and then in booklet form as a walking guide, *What's Wat's Dyke?* may not look like a standardy comic. And the question of whether this work is or is not a comic (Wysocki, pers. comm.) has implications when understanding how the authors chose to frame and present information about Wat's Dyke. Comics about history, archaeology, and cultural and community heritage may take many forms: they may be short, four-panel strips or longer narrative works. Such works may also adopt different narrative positionalities – personal (Richardson and Pickering 2021), fictive (Rajic and Howarth 2021) or revisionist (Lopez and Sheyashe 2021) – and utilise different qualities of aesthetics (Brophy and Sackett 2019), genre (Vowel *et al.* 2019) and style (el-Gawad and Stevenson 2021).

Comics encompasses all these forms and more because it is not defined by publication format, narrative voice, genre or aesthetic approach. Rather, it is a medium defined by a relationship between image and text (Brunetti 2011: 45; McCloud 1993: 17; McCloud 2006: 129). In a comic, image and text do not simply accompany one another, but are interrelated in such a way that the resultant narrative emerges from a dual reading of image and text together. An illustrated article may be understood without its figures; a map may be useful even without an accompanying explanation - but a comic cannot be meaningfully understood by looking at the images in isolation or reading the captions and speech balloons on their own. The specific combination of 'word+image' in each panel or on every page – different in each of the comics above, for example – have been chosen in order to evoke specific readings.

Similarly, the evocation of place and meaning in *What's Wat's Dyke?* cannot be acquired by viewing Williams' text nor Swogger's artwork separately. Swogger's artwork for 'Wat's Dyke at the School' (comic panel 3, location 6) shows the Buckingham Road alleyway and visually describes how to spot the earthwork remains of bank and ditch; the text discusses its historical context in both the 1930s and the early medieval period. The art does not replicate the text, nor vice versa; instead, the "whole story' emerges from the interaction between the two. Thus, regardless of the publication format, either as a series of non-linear hyperlinked pages or as a walking guide booklet, narrative voice, genre or aesthetic approach, it is the affordances of the *medium* which define the work and how it is read. Comics, as a communication toolset, has allowed the authors to frame and present both the invisibility and disconnectedness of Wat's Dyke as monument and information about it in a particular way.

If a comic is much more than simply image and text – rather, image and text working together - then the dynamic between the two elements can be considered a unique third component. When creating a comic, choice of image and selection of text are simply the starting point. It is how they are brought together, how they play against one another and how that interaction shapes the narrative which is the essence of the process. In the same way, the creative dynamics involved between those making a comic – writer, artist, consultant, editor, and so on – determines the effectiveness and affectiveness of the final output as much as the choice of words, style of artwork or nature of the content. To understand how an applied comic such as What's Wat's Dyke? is made, it is necessary to understand how those two dynamic relationships play out in both practice and process.

The multiple moving parts involved in comics creation means it is sometimes difficult to identify a clear beginning to a particular project. Where did the idea come from? Whose idea was it? How did the idea first take shape? Indeed, the final product of many comics projects are quite different from the initial concept, if only because – in archaeology, at least – it may be the first time ever that the medium has been applied to a particular subject matter, site or monument.

This was certainly the case with Wat's Dyke. Not only had there never been a comic about it made before, meaning that there was a complete lack of precedent for approach,

visual style, content or intended audience, there is also minimal published academic or 'popular' writing about the monument. Indeed, there is even minimal on-site interpretation material for the monument (Swogger and Williams 2020: 198; Williams 2020a: 172–184). It can be harder to work from a completely blank canvas: a lack of precedent also means a lack of boundaries, a lack of intellectual 'map' with which to chart the progress of a project.

Charting the development of an applied comic from idea to final product can also be difficult because the parts played by different participants are not fixed, nor is the schedule through which they interact they necessarily the same from one project to the next. In contrast to the process by which an academic article is created, there is considerably more blurring of roles and boundaries. Taking this article as an example, decades of publishing precedents have established fairly clearly delineated parameters for the role of author, co-author and journal editor. Each person involved in the process tends to understand what is expected of them, where in the production timetable they will be making their contribution, and what the outcomes of that contribution are.

This is not necessarily the case in the creation of an applied comic. Even with only two creative participants, roles were shared and swapped, overlapped and re-prioritised, expanded and constrained in different ways for each individual illustrated panel and accompanying text. The dynamics of applied comics creation are not often documented, but when they are it is clear that they vary considerably not just from one project to the next, but even within the course of an individual project (Wysocki *et al.* 2020). Broadly, each of the Wat's Dyke panels began with a sketch and draft text from Williams, which was then incorporated into a draft image by Swogger. Comments and feedback from Williams were then returned to Swogger, resulting in a more advanced draft, at such time the text was then also modified, leading then to a final draft of both text and image. Yet, even across only ten panels, this model was subject to much alteration. In the case of some panels, such as 4, more feedback and response took place, including the creating of an alternative version which was ultimately rejected. Whereas with some panels, such as panel 10, the process was much more straightforward. This panel involved only one round of feedback and no modification of the text. With panels 6 and 7, the inclusion of detailed representations of a thegn and a motte-and-bailey castle, respectively, prompted us to solicit specialist feedback from experts via social media; some of their suggestions were included, some were not. The specifics of some of these exceptions to the above rule are explored in more detail below.

Finally, there were considerations and constraints given the timing and circumstances of the comic's creation. *What's Wat's Dyke?* began life pre-pandemic, conceived as a tourist information style map-based leaflet (Swogger and Williams 2020). During 2020 and 2021, much of the context for the project which had been utterly taken for granted in 2019 shifted dramatically. Assumptions about how the comic was to be produced, how it would be distributed and who its audience would be – elements

which have a direct impact on how the comic would be written and drawn –– had to be completely rethought. How can you encourage people to visit a monument when the country is in lockdown? How can you distribute an informational product when visitor centres, schools and museums are closed? As elsewhere in the heritage industry, rapid readjustment was necessary at a time when work, home and family were also subject to the same renegotiations to find 'the new normal'. During its production, the scale and pace of removal of lockdown restrictions were unclear, and even now (September 2021), much remains uncertain about the future. Assumptions about how the practicalities of a collaborative project would be organised were similarly overturned. No casual dropping-in to offices for a quick chat about panel three, no day-long rambles over the Dyke, no pop-up public consultations. Instead, face-to-face meetings became Zooms, casual conversations became emails, and even visits to the Dyke itself became complicated by access and social distancing. All of these things, too, had their impact on the way the comic came together and the dynamics which shaped its creation.

Documenting such things is about more than simply recounting how the present authors spent Lockdown. The practice of making comics about archaeological sites and monuments is still very much in its infancy. It is a new field, and practitioners, commissioning clients, consultants, artists and audiences are all still finding their way, figuring out what works best and how to turn the lessons from one project and one set of circumstances into guidance on how to do the next (Swogger 2019a and 2020c). While all creative practice tends to have its element of quirk, serendipity and mystery, that should not simply be boiled down to 'well, you'll just have to figure it out on your own', in determining general principles or transferrable approaches. It should be possible to use the specifics of practice and process of *What's Wat's Dyke?* to help inform other comics projects about other earthwork monuments, early mediaeval archaeology, or invisible, overlooked or neglected heritage. One would like to hope that *What's Wat's Dyke?*, as well as informing one kind of audience about this somewhat overlooked early medieval earthwork, would also inform another kind of audience about how they might approach a comic about (for sake of argument) Bronze Age burial mounds or rural medieval moated sites.

Rather than speak in generalities, the intersection of creative dynamics, collaborative dynamics and practical considerations can be examined by looking in more detail at one panel as a particular case-study: panel 3, 'Wat's Dyke at the School' (although the discussion will also inevitably draw on other panels in the series).

Wat's Dyke at the School

The line of Wat's Dyke preserved along the back-garden boundary of Wrexham Garden Village, where it divides the houses and the grounds of Wat's Dyke Primary School from the green space and playing fields to the south, featured strongly in early conversations between the authors as far back as the autumn of 2019. Possibly, it may have even cropped

up in conversations as a clear example of the lasting physical legacy of the Dyke's bank and ditch in the landscape before then. And while the location was only briefly noted by Williams in a blog-post on Archaeodeath in early 2019 (Williams 2019b, 2019c), when visiting Wat's Dyke later that year to determine which areas would feature in the comic, the Buckingham Road alley location quickly became a focus for that section of the dyke. Indeed, it was subsequently highlighted by the authors in their outline of the proposed comic project the following year (Swogger and Williams 2020: 202).

The rough draft figure which accompanies a discussion of the location demonstrates the extent to which the location had become key to outlining the proposed approach for the comic. In the rough draft, Williams stands as narrator in front of the surviving section of the bank and ditch, which is then partially reconstructed on one side, showing a possible palisade and watchtower. The rough draft image incorporates key conceptual and creative elements: the use of an identifiable researcher-as-narrator, the depiction of an actual location as a means by which a reader might then be able to identify the monument on the ground, and a reconstruction showing the monument as it might have looked when originally constructed (Figure 2).

The subtle but important changes that distinguish this, proposed, rough draft and the final draft that ultimately emerged catalogue the dynamic nature of the creative process, and serve – in microcosm – as a guide to the nature of some of the working relationships between writer, artist, editor and audience.

Point of view

The first notable difference between the two panels is the point of view. In the proposed rough draft, the view is at ground-level; in the final version, it is from a position about twenty feet from the ground. While the rough draft view is more 'realistic', in that it is more likely to be shared by a prospective audience, the final draft view shows the bank and ditch more clearly, while still being proximal enough to human-scale to allow a reader to distinguish and appreciate the actions and roles played by the people within the image. The point of view also allowed for the inclusion of more than one person, and so enabled the inclusion of more than one informative perspective: that of the cyclists and accompanying parent, the walker with the dog, and the person on the mobility scooter. These figures do more than simply fill up space. First and foremost, they provide a sense of scale and context. The figures allow us to tell intuitively, without resorting to the artificiality of a metre-stick, the size and extent of the bank and ditch. This sense of scale is reinforced by the placement of figures at more or less regular intervals along the surviving monument. They also provide clues as to the context for the monument's location as domestic, household, ordinary and every day. These figures are out for a late afternoon stroll, not far from back gardens, sheds and patios. They help embed the idea of Wat's Dyke as surviving – literally – on 'home turf'.
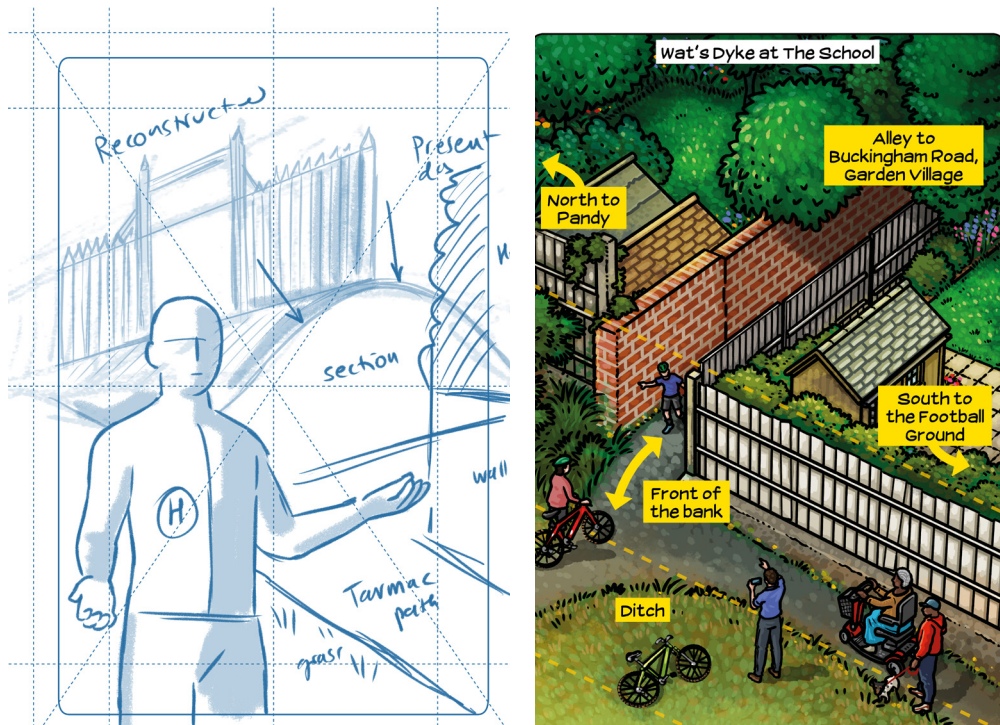
Figure 2: (a) draft of panel 3 and (b) the final image, both by John Swogger

This shift in point-of-view came in May 2021, eighteen months after the authors' initial 'on-the-ground' discussions and the subsequent publication of the proposed rough draft for this panel. And while the passage of time can certainly have an impact on creative direction, what was more significant was the impact of the pandemic. As previously described (above), the pandemic engendered a shift in presentation from the real to the digital: from a map-leaflet to a series of hyperlinked pages. This shift affected more than just the potential audience and mode of consumption of the comic: it affected its content.

What people mean

The second notable difference between the rough draft panel and its final iteration is that the figure of the researcher-as-narrator has vanished. This is usually a key component of other similar works. The inclusion of the researcher-as-narrator within the comic enables the audience to identify clearly who carries out research, and for the story of that research to be presented in the first person. Often, this is one of the only times when such researchers are afforded this kind of visibility in public outreach. It makes scientific and fieldwork narratives more grounded and more human-focused (Swogger forthcoming). But in the shift to an online presentation, that visibility and voice could be carried by the hosting context – in this case, on the pages of the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory.[4]

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[4]   When subsequently published in print (Williams and Swogger 2021a), the presence of a cartoon version of Howard Williams fronting the booklet's introduction reinstated this integral researcher-as-narrator.

Made during the revision to the rough draft 18 May, the decision to drop the foregrounded figure of the narrator served to open up the panel visually, enabling more of a focus on the details of the surviving section of bank and ditch. The trade-off was noted in correspondence between the authors:

> Despite liking tremendously your ground-level perspective… I feel that this is going to work much better, with the colour coding implying the surviving hint of former bank and ditch only partially surviving in the steep rise of slope towards the alleyway.[5]

Considerations of what is shown, how and why are not just confined to the archaeology – or to the past. Here, the decision not to include a narrator was taken with the understanding that the presentation itself would afford information about the identity of the researcher. In a similar way, the attitudes and activities of the figures in the panel were used to encode other, non-archaeological information about the location: the fact that it was accessible on foot, by bicycle and by those walking dogs: '…as with Pandy, this is dog-walking zone, so maybe add a hound on a lead again…'[6]

The image was further amended to include a woman on a mobility scooter: following the preview of the comic on Twitter a commentator queried which sections of the trail were fully accessible. As noted above, this information was eventually included in the form of icons on the main map. In this context, the presence of a figure using a scooter cemented that meta-information within the comic itself.

Marking time

The third notable difference between the rough and final drafts of the panel was the lack of any reconstruction element, showing the form and extent of the dyke as it might have originally been constructed. Instead, the presence of this original form and extent is indicated by dashed lines, an arrow to indicate slope, and labels for 'bank' and 'ditch'. This decision, made by Swogger independently of Williams, was taken in light of the developing rough drafts for the entire series of ten panels - something which had not been done when the original rough draft was published. This shifting around of elements, viewpoints and informational perspectives demonstrates one of the unique affordances of comics. As a single image, it might make sense to try and fit as much information as possible into one piece of artwork – but as one image in a series of ten, it made more sense to spread the informational load across all the artwork. Each picture, then, could focus on a subset of the entire informational content. Panels 1, 5, 6, 7 and 8 all featured the Dyke at times other than the present; panels 1 and 6 specifically in the Early Middle Ages. As far as panel 3 was concerned, the 'job' of depicting the Dyke as it might have originally been constructed had been taken up by others in the series, leaving

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5   Email, HW to JS, 18 May 2021.
6   Email HW to JS, 18 May 2021.

this one free to focus more completely the visual complexities inherent in the partial survival and partial re-use of the bank within the Garden Village boundary, as Williams indicated: 'It's arguably the most important and most difficult we have to execute....'[7]

In a medium which uses sequences of images to help structure informational narrative, explanation can be divided up between multiple images: in this case, panels. Spreading out an explanation through the course of a reader's engagement with the work as a whole alleviates the need for any given image to do 'everything'. Each panel explains Wat's Dyke at a specific place but each panel also contributes towards a larger explanation of the earthwork's as a (whole) monument, across multiple places. Thus, the visualised explanation of the dyke 'as it might originally have been', in panel 1, can be combined by readers with the visualised explanation of the dyke 'as it survives at Buckingham Road' to create a total informational impression that is more than simply the sum of constituent parts. However, because the map provided a 'hub' to the work, through which panels and locations could be accessed by a reader irrespective of any north–south geographical connection, each comic panel had to be able to function not just as one in a series, but – potentially – as the first panel encountered by a reader. It was necessary, therefore, to avoid relying on other panels in the series when formatting each panel's story. It had to be the case that one would be able to understand the explanation of the dyke 'as it survives at Buckingham Road' on its own, without necessarily having read previously the explanation of the dyke 'as it might originally have been' from panel 1.

Comics are a constructive medium, with information being assembled by the reader from constituent elements. Such complications can be thought of as being addressed not all at once, in one image, definitively - but in the form of a networked answer, spread across multiple images, connected in multiple ways via hyperlinks, and joined together in a process in which the readers themselves are participants. The decision to replace a 'reconstructed' dyke with one indicated by dashed lines is simply one of the ways in which comics can bring into play, for different reasons, different ways of visualising time. More, it is possible to represent within a single image a complex multiplicity of temporalities. In this panel, the dashed lines represent both where the labelled bank and ditch of the earthwork 'was then' in the early medieval period, and where it 'is now' in 2021. In panel 7, however, the dashed lines represent both where the dyke 'was then' in the early medieval period, as well as 'was then' in the late eleventh/early twelfth centuries, and 'is now' in 2021. At the same time as the artwork represents the Dyke as it 'is now' in the later medieval period. While in analysis, this can come across as confusing, in the panel, that complexity – while no less sophisticated – is rendered as self-evident and intuitive.[8]

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[7]   Email, HW to JS, 18 May 2021.
[8]   Again, one of the reasons that Swogger has grown to love comics for archaeological communication: it simultaneously facilitates and leverages reader comprehension rather than relying on prior knowledge.

This temporal diversity also characterises the work as a whole. For a comic subtitled *Wat's Dyke* (the medieval monument) *in* (present-day) *Wrexham*, fully 50% of the panels feature neither the early medieval period nor the present day. Instead, following the route of Wat's Dyke through the town takes readers to the later medieval period, the Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian periods, and the twenty-first century. And yet, it is made clear that the story of the earthwork in all these other time periods is, indeed, the story of the medieval monument in present day Wrexham. It was the authors' original intention to create a comic which would, beyond the estimated early medieval origins of the monument 'introduce audiences to the rest of the history of Wrexham: Wat's Dyke providing a literal and metaphorical thread to follow through the town's story.' (Swogger and Williams 2020: 201). It is the constructive nature of the medium, and its ability to represent in a single image a palimpsest of temporalities, which makes telling that kind of a story possible.

Re-writing text

The final element missing from the original rough draft, but there in the final presentation of the panel is the text. Originally, when the aim of the project was to create a leaflet-map, this text would have been presented within the panels as a series of captions, labels and direct speech spoken by the researcher-narrator. In the shift to an online format, some of this text ended up outside the panel. Lacking the funding to create a stand-alone app, and bearing in mind that the project was still considered in many ways a 'pilot' (Swogger and Williams 2020: 201), it was decided that the comics would be hosted online as pages on the Wordpress site of the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory. This meant that audiences might access the comic via any number of digital devices: phones, tablets or large desktop computers. As a consequence, the text resolution within the image could not be specified, meaning that text sufficiently large to read on a large desktop computer wouldn't necessarily be readable on a phone screen. The decision was taken to format the comic with only labels within the panels, and the remainder of the text as essentially an accompanying caption on the webpage.

Once again, this was a decision imposed by the constraints of the pandemic. Had the comic been intended as a digital app from the beginning, presentation of text and image would have been done quite differently. But, that aside, the consequence of this decision was two-fold: first, there was an opportunity to include more text with each image as both were not competing for the same space within the panel, and second, the text was now juxtaposed with the image in slightly different ways. This also had knock-on ramifications regarding the cost of Welsh translation.

Compare, for instance, the original draft of the text written by Williams *before* the image was redesigned:

People live and learn on Wat's Dyke!

The early medieval monument is now part of Wrexham's northern suburbs when Garden Village was built in the 1930s. Today, you can follow it in the fence lines south of Ty Gwyn Lane and west of Wats Dyke Way. At the top of the hill, it divides the Garden Village Playing Field and Wat's Dyke Primary School.

Dropping downhill, it survives under the property boundaries at the back of Buckingham Road before being lost beneath houses closer to Wrexham town.[9]

With the text revised by Swogger as it accompanied the second rough draft (significant changes highlighted):

People live and learn on Wat's Dyke!

Here, the dyke was incorporated into Wrexham's northern suburbs when the Garden Village was built in the 1930s. You can follow it in the fence lines of the gardens south of Ty Gwyn Lane and west of Wat's Dyke Way. At the top of the hill, it separates the Garden Village Playing Field from Wat's Dyke Primary School.

Heading downhill, the dyke then survives under the property boundaries at the back of Buckingham Road before being lost beneath houses closer to Wrexham town.

These boundaries remind us that Wat's Dyke was originally built as part of the frontier between the early medieval Welsh kingdoms to the west and the territories of the Kingdom of Mercia to the east.[10]

The text was subsequently amended by Williams and ultimately as published:

People live and learn on Wat's Dyke!

Wat's Dyke was incorporated into Wrexham's northern suburbs when Garden Village was built in the 1930s. You can follow it in the fence lines of the gardens south of Ty Gwyn Lane and west of Wats Dyke Way. At the top of the hill it separates the Garden Village Playing Field from Wat's Dyke Primary School.

Heading downhill, the dyke then survives under property boundaries at the back of Buckingham Road before being lost beneath houses closer to Wrexham town. *Here we see the bank of the Dyke surviving in the slope from an alley running from Buckingham Road.*

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[9]   Email, HW to JS, 22 April 2021
[10]   Email, JS to HW, 18 April 2021

> These boundaries remind us that Wat's Dyke was likely originally part of the frontier between early medieval Welsh kingdoms to the west and the territories of the Kingdom of Mercia to the east.

The alterations are subtle, but significant. The authors' addition of the final paragraph provides the physical description of the location of the section in Williams' original version of the text with explanatory context - the sort of text that the researcher-as-narrator usually supplies, and which in this case refers back to the imagery in panel 1. Williams' addition to the close of the second paragraph in the published version restates the connection between the visual explanation and its specific location. In both cases, the refinements to the text make up for the presentational deficiencies of this *not* being a 'proper' comic. In other words, if this panel had been presented within a comic book, an inset map would have been sufficient to visually clarify the specifics of the location, and the researcher-as-narrator character present within the panel would have spoken the contextualised explanation of the dyke as a frontier. The accompanying text - while in no way 'bad' – essentially compensates for the lack of comics-based elements which, for various reasons, could not be included in this particular format.[11]

Who does what?

Implicit in the above analysis is evidence of the fungible nature of the roles played by both authors at various times in the process. This paper, for example, integrates reworkings of ideas and material provisionally published by the authors (Swogger and Williams 2020), a draft by Williams, significant and extensive additional material by Swogger, then reviews and additions by both. A collaboration as co-authors is based on both having fairly well-defined roles at each stage in the process: writer, reviewer, discussant. By contrast, each comic panel - image and text – was created in a much more entangled way, in which the boundaries between roles were often somewhat indistinct. And while that closer collaboration was constrained, certainly, by the social distancing of the pandemic and interrupted by the day-to-day disruptions – personal and professional – that accompanied lockdowns, it was nevertheless quite unlike the collaboration involved in this paper. In the production of the comic, although nominally defined by speciality and experience, the roles of writer, artist, consultant and editor were, in actuality, quite fluid.

As much as one of us focused on drawing or writing, the other was involved in crucial commentary, critique and alteration. It is only by following the chain of emails closely that it can be determined who contributed what to both text and final artwork. Williams, though claiming to be no artist himself, supplied sketches and photographs that often-defined specific elements of each panel. For panel 1, an initial drawing by Williams (Figure 3) was not simply the starting point for the final artwork, but was, in sketch form, its final appearance. By contrast,

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[11] In many respects, this illustrates precisely why Swogger became interested in comics as a communication medium for archaeology in the first place.
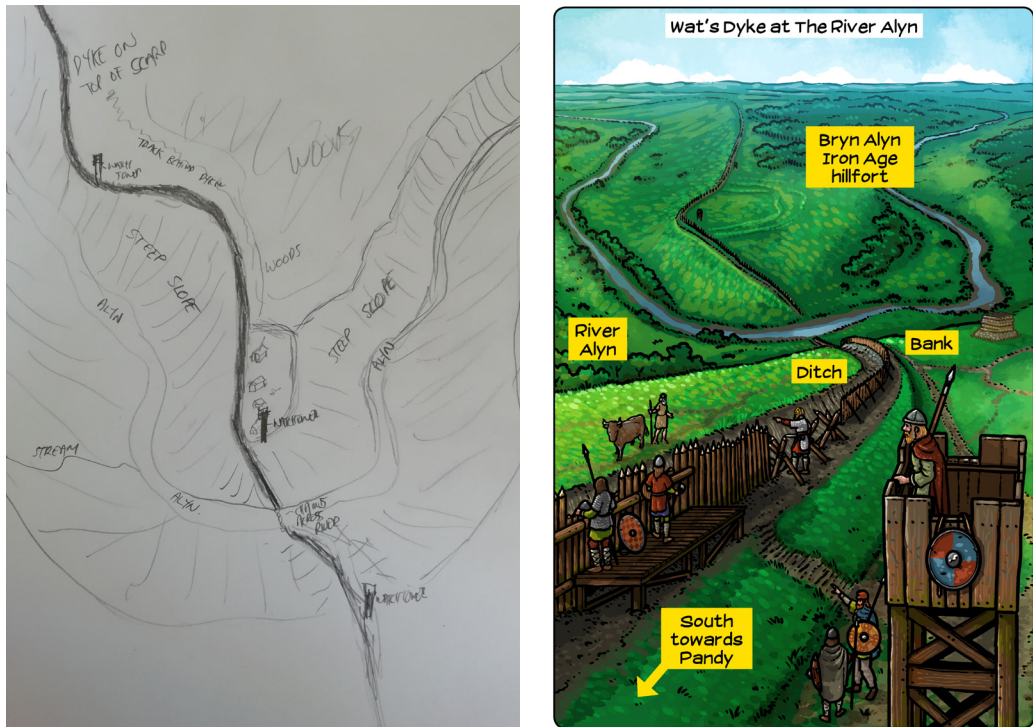
Figure 3: (a) preliminary sketch for panel 1 by Howard Williams and (b) the final image by John Swogger.

however, there were some instances where the development of the artwork proceeded entirely counter to Williams' initial expectations, as with panel 7, for example.

> ...this isn't the perspective I'd thought you'd take but in doing so it does so much more – the overlap potential with 6 is great! River and Black Brook joining it allows the confluence to be clear and parallel to panel 1 to be evident. Overall, the aerial view complements panel 1 and shows the 2 main river crossings in this stretch.[12]

The points of view chosen for panel 6 and panel 7 (the first a view looking directly at Court Wood, the second a view looking down over the confluence of the River Clywedog and Black Brook) were both inspired by Williams' sketches (Figures 4a and 5a), not because those sketches represented, in rough form, the final artwork (as with panel 1), but because they facilitated discussion about the impact on readers of facing the dyke from a particular compass direction in terms of shaping an impression about the nature of the monument's story at the particular location.

It is important to note that Williams' visualisation of the initial concept was effective even if not necessarily aesthetically polished or highly detailed. Visualisation as an

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12   Email, HW to JS, 22 April.

intra-disciplinary communications tool receives little attention because such 'sketches' are considered too rough or crude to be worthy of formal attention (Causey 2017: 44). But these initial drawings perform an important function: quickly and efficiently focusing discussion on key visual concepts at the primary stage of discussion – what Bernd Heinrich describes as a fieldwork practice that helps a researcher 'extract the signal from the overwhelming noise' of data (Heinrich 2011: 45). Visualisations at this stage, 'even if they are really crude and rough' demonstrate clarity of vision (cf. Keller 2011: 164), setting up an immediate hierarchy of visual priorities that guides onward discussion. In Williams' initial sketch for panel 7 (Figure 5a), for example, it was clear that to show the dyke as a solid barrier at this point was important – even if, as ultimately was the case, this point of view and its accompanying contextual and aesthetic impact was transferred to the narrative of panel 6. As perhaps suits the comics medium, the two rough drafts for these panels emerged from an interplay of ideas expressed in words (emails) and images (sketches) (Figures 4b and 5b).

As with any other process of comic-making, sometimes the images proceed from the text, and sometimes it's the other way around; sometimes alterations to the artwork impact the text, and sometimes it's the other way around. Williams' published photographs of the Buckingham Road alley, his notes about the presence of dog-walkers, further observations about the direction and nature of the slope-defining arrows, and the text in various labels contributed as significantly to the final artwork in the same way as my final paragraph did to the text: artist-as-writer and writer-as-artist.

Williams' active role as public archaeologist allowed the project to access 'real-time' feedback on disability and access which, as previously noted, shaped not just the artwork, but structured elements of its informational content. The importance of this role is also evidenced in the artwork for panel 6 'Wat's Dyke at Court Wood', where Twitter users' comments and queries resulted in significant alterations to its details.

> ... the rim ought to be stitched, if organic, or if metal, thinner and held on with riveted clips rather than nailed directly [...] [and a] re-enactor queries use of a brooch for the cloak thinking of the lack of them from furnished graves, but I'm happy to go with it since we do have 8th/9th-century disc brooches that needn't be all female-used.[13]

> chap on horse is wearing a narrowseax. By c8th it should probably be a heavy or atypical broadseax, or an early (non-broken-back) longseax. Arrangement of sheath is mostly correct, but the folded back (lowermost) should bend upwards at the tip, so the seam-line (with the metal fittings) is straight rather than curving.[14]

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[13] Email, HW to JS, 26 June 2021.
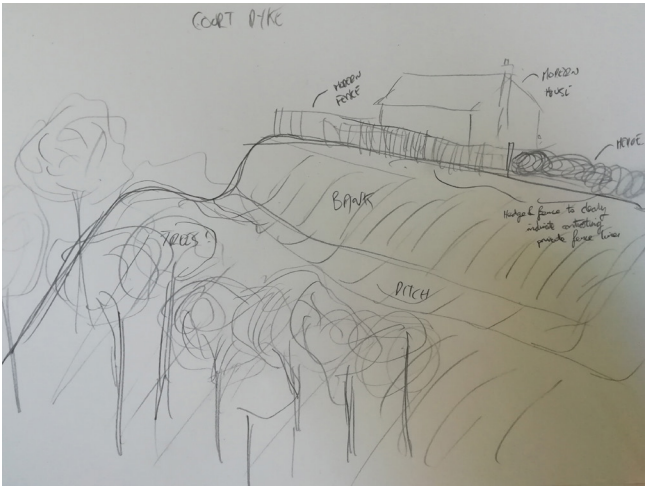[14] Email, HW to JS, 26 June 2021.

Figure 4: (a) (left) preliminary sketch for panel 6 by Howard Williams and (b) (below) the draft by John Swogger
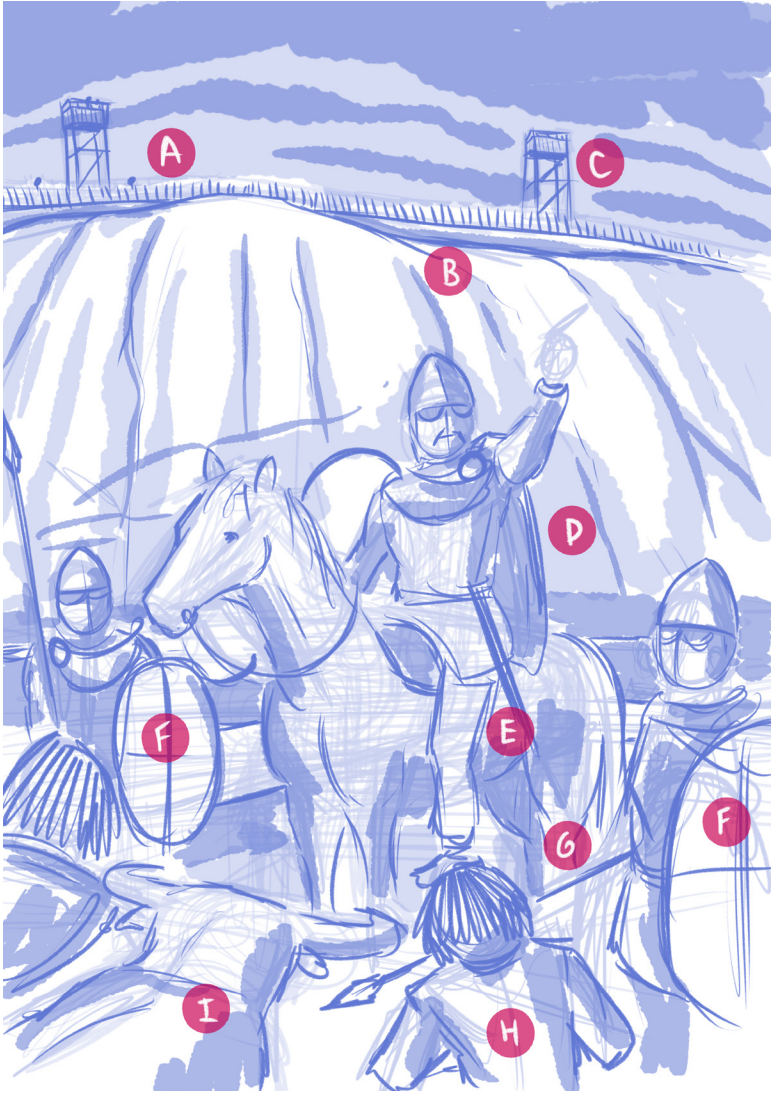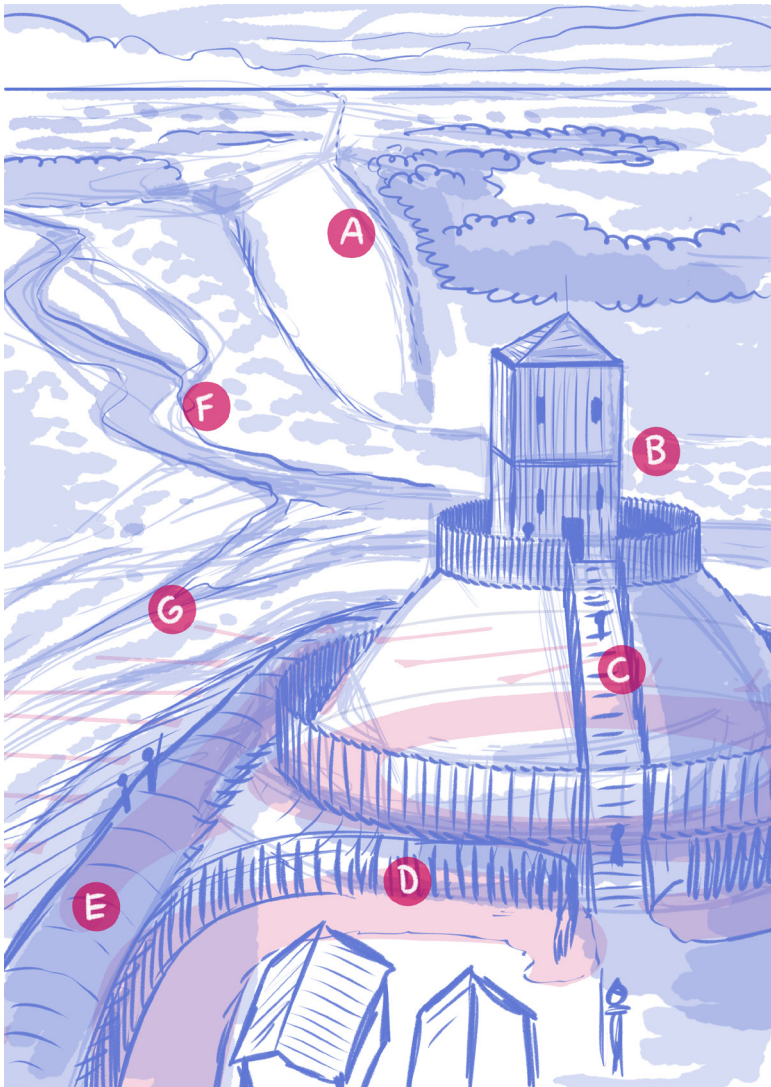
Figure 5: (a) (left) preliminary sketch for panel 7 by Howard Williams and (b) (below) the draft by John Swogger

While receiving and processing expert commentary of this kind is usual in the course of creating any archaeological reconstruction, regardless of style or medium, the fact that such comments affected not just the look of the artwork but the narrative within is significant. Comments from various castle experts on the Norman motte-and-bailey castle in Panel 7 'Wat's Dyke at Erddig Castle' began with observation on structural details.

> Someone asked whether there should be a ladder to over-gate platforms. Not essential.
>
> Wall-walk inside the bailey and motte-top palisades? If too complicated, ignore.
>
> Someone said: 'cram in more buildings in the bailey as per Hen Domen – up to you, but maybe add the edge of a third building to the far-bottom-right?
>
> Motte looks too steep (it is fine as is of course, this is a common concern because folks are used to seeing them eroded).
>
> Water in moat ditches? I'm not at all sure about this given the well-drained and promontory location. Maybe stakes and bushes? Or just leave as is and we can put it down to seasonal pooling.[15]

Many of these comments did, in fact, result in changes to the artwork. But the comments also led to suggestions about how the image should be *described*, as well as drawn:

> One person says there should be a confluence of rivers. You show this already but they claim not to have seen it. Solution: (i) can you make the water a deeper blue for the rivers so that it is more clearly differentiated from the snow? (ii) can you replace 'South to Big Wood' with 'Black Brook' to annotate that stream and put 'South to Big Wood maybe inside the bailey?[16]

Still others moved on from mere visual detail to comments which suggested how the *narrative* of the image might be structured:

> You've got the palisades round the top of the motte, which is (as far as anything is) fairly standard in this sort of the castle. I like the little gate house, the tower seems reasonable and you've got buildings in the bailey. This might seem daft, but do you have space for a horse? Once your rooftop sentinel has spotted. something, then the messenger must ride forth. It also helps underline the interconnectedness of sites and landscape.[17]

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[15]   Email, HW to JS, 27 June 2021.
[16]   Email, HW to JS, 27 June 2021.
[17]   Email, HW to JS, 27 June 2021.

In other words, in the same way that the inclusion of the dog-walker, cyclists and woman on a mobility scooter in panel 3 helped communicate meta-information about accessibility along that section of the dyke, so too was this commentator suggesting that the inclusion of a man and a horse would say something about the nature of Norman border-control policy. He was quite right to say so, and a horse and rider was duly included. But significantly, this comment also altered the accompanying text, with the following paragraph added by Williams after the changes were made to the artwork:

> Despite being constructions for contrasting times and built centuries apart, both Wat's Dyke and Erddig Castle made use of the topography to control and dominate the Anglo-Welsh borderland. Are they both stages in the colonisation of the landscape: first by the Mercians, later by the Normans? (Williams and Swogger 2021a: panel 7, 2021b: 18)

So, who *did* write this comic? Who *did* draw it? In a very real sense, the back-and-forth nature of the collaborative dynamics made it easy to include material from a wide range of contributors, both expert and otherwise. Critically, it makes it easy to extend the notion of authorship to include not only *academic* experts, but those whose expertise is no less significant, yet traditionally 'othered' by academic control over archaeological outreach: re-enactors, gamers, school-teachers. Comics can facilitate a dispersed authorship drawing on community-based as well as scholarly knowledge (Swogger forthcoming), braiding them together so that roles are swapped, overlapped and re-prioritised as the work requires. With such a fluidity of approach, it becomes easy for the writer to influence the artwork, the artist to rework the text, and the reader to alter the story.

Potential and possibilities

To date,[18] the comic introduction and pdf have been viewed over 740 times and individual comic pages between 35and 60 views each, while the YouTube video has received 281 views. Positive feedback has been received from various academics and local people but we have deferred structured feedback until after the COVID-19 lockdowns and ongoing pandemic-related restrictions have concluded. From experience with the *Oswestry Heritage Comics* project (Swogger 2019b) we anticipate the best feedback will come from face-to-face discussions with local groups and individuals when we can facilitate structured use of, and feedback on, the comics with local communities and stakeholders.

In our preliminary discussion (Swogger and Williams 2020), we identified the potential for building on this initiative through an animation project and reflected on the wider applicability of this medium for embedding in research processes and community cocreation as well as disseminating the results. This has implications across disciplines for the study of linear monuments which are especially challenge to apprehend within

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[18] 4 November 2021.

individual locales due to vagaries of survival and development. Indeed, specifically for linear structures, the potential is there for dialogues and synergies between monuments across the globe and very different periods of the human past using the comic medium.

So, *What's Wat's Dyke?* can only be considered as a pilot exercise. The course of Wat's Dyke as it passes through Wrexham represents only about a third of the monument's length and perhaps not even that of its story. The northern section of Wat's Dyke to Basingwerk and the southern extent to the River Morda could equally be the subject of a comic project. Even within the Wrexham section, where at least fifteen sections of the dyke surviving under different circumstances (Swogger and Williams 2020: 197, fig. 1), the comic only covered ten of those locations. Even within these ten locations, there were many aspects of the monument's story that could not, for reasons of space, be covered. There have also been funding and practical constraints on what could or could not be included within the current project. But, as indicated, there may be opportunities to expand the trail at some point. We are grateful for the funding provided by the Offa's Dyke Association for the development of a print booklet based on the comic – but regret that it isn't possible at present to elide its publication with an outreach programme at Wat's Dyke Primary School, for example. Similarly, we are fortunate that the Offa's Dyke Collaboratory website was available to host the online Welsh and English versions of the trail although we regret that funding is not available to translate this digital presentation into a fully functional app. A larger-scale digital version of this comic as an app might include not just more locations on the map, but more links from each panel in order to pick out overarching themes or other discussion points; even opportunities to discuss how the comic was written and drawn.[19]

However, one would like to think that such unfulfilled ambitions simply suggest the potential for development of the approach and future projects. In this regard, we see not only potential for taking the comic heritage trail and applying it to other sections of Wat's Dyke, Offa's Dyke and the 'short dykes' of the Welsh Marches, but also to a host of other linear heritage monuments: tracks, ridgeways, roads, rivers, canals, tramways, railways. The power of this approach is that it can transcend dominant divisions, such as county and national boundaries, creating connections and building bridges over both time and space. Hence, there are many archaeological sites and monuments which seem impervious to attempts to raise their profile, communicate their importance or argue for their significance. It is sometimes assumed, contrary to the evidence of continuity in local memory (Lloyd Jones and Gale 2020), that such monuments are inherently lacking in some way – they are too difficult to see, too difficult to understand or too difficult to relate to, and that it is this inherent deficiency which impedes public engagement. It could also, however, be that the approach and media chosen for outreach are simply not suited to those monuments' interpretative and narrative requirements.

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[19]   An opportunity to explore a truly non-linear, 'Choose Your Own Adventure'-style exploration of an ancient monument and its physical and intellectual landscape through an application of McCloud's concept of an 'infinite canvas' of comics panels linked not by a left-right reading order, but by interactive decisions made by readers (McCloud 1993: 205 and 2000: 200ff).

For example, what interpretative or narrative 'needs' might a barely-visible early mediaeval moated site on an obscure section of rural footpath have? The real story might not necessarily be about the Middle Ages, but why the site was not ploughed away in the eighteenth century, why the nineteenth century road bends around it, and how it ended up colonised by rare newts and irises after the Second World War. The story of a site like this might need to be told in reference to the wider agricultural community, with the moated site a constant throughout its shifting social history, economic fortunes and changing climate. As with Wat's Dyke, in reframing a monument as being of a particular place rather than of a particular period, it might be easier for an audience to see the mediaeval monument through the perspective of Victorian reuse and in doing so, discover new relevance for previously neglected heritage (panel 5). Visualising an overlooked archaeological monument as local (panel 4) connected to historical community figures (panel 5) and better-known places (panel 8), existing and aspirational activities (panels 9 and 10) or within every-day, domestic contexts (panel 3) can help ground the unfamiliar (panel 6) or the unexpected (panel 7) and make sense of otherwise incomprehensible humps and bumps in fields and waste-ground (panels 1 and 2).

Williams (2020a) has demonstrated how, despite a variety of approaches, media and materials, public-facing interpretation of Wat's Dyke has largely failed both the monument and its complex story. Outreach for archaeology which is difficult to see, difficult to understand or difficult to relate to must first help its audiences to see, understand and relate before it tries to explain. Outreach for monuments which are fragmented, which exist as historical artefacts in multiple periods and which mean different things to different past peoples must help audiences untangle and connect not just across space but through time as well. It is not possible to tell *the* story of Wat's Dyke, because that story changes every half mile. Making sense of eighty different stories along the whole length of the dyke requires a medium that can build coherence out of unrelated fragments; perhaps it isn't possible to tell the story of Wat's Dyke effectively through any medium other than comics. If the story of Wat's Dyke is actually the story of how a medieval monument is also a Norman monument, a Georgian monument, a Victorian monument, a modern monument, then perhaps the story of *What's Wat's Dyke?* is the story of how the nature of the monument guides us to a series of interleaving stories. These are not just stories about Mercian military aspirations and political hegemony – stories of ethnic division and political power and authority – but also stories of the inheritors of the monument within contrasting and changing socio-economic and cultural environments. This is as much about celebrating the military redundancy and the fleeting socio-political significance of the early medieval monument, as it involves delving into Wat's Dyke's many afterlives in which its significance is remembered, forgotten and repeatedly reinvented.

Acknowledgements

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